Beat: Travel

Wreckage found from plane that vanished off China in 1958

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USPA News - Wreckage from a plane that mysteriously vanished over waters between mainland China and Taiwan more than half a century ago has finally been recovered, confirming the fate of the aircraft that was carrying American and Taiwanese service members, officials said on Monday. The civilian PBY-5A amphibious plane, which was nicknamed the "Blue Swan" or "Blue Goose," was carrying eleven passengers and crew members when it disappeared over the Taiwan Strait on October 1, 1958. The aircraft - owned by what is today known as TransAsia Airways - had been charted by Taiwan`s military for a flight from the Matsu Islands to the Taiwanese capital of Taipei.

The incident had long faded from the public`s memory, but its disappearance during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis sparked speculation about whether the aircraft had been hijacked or shot down by China, as it had done in previous years. An intense, three-day-long search by aircraft and ships from the United States and Taiwan found no wreckage or survivors. Now, more than half a century later, it is finally known what happened to the aircraft after fishermen from Matsu picked up a rusty propeller while trawling in the Taiwan Strait earlier this year. Investigators have now been able to link the wreckage to the Blue Swan after identifying the Hamilton Standard-made propeller. The news was first reported by the China Times and later confirmed by local officials on the Matsu Islands. But with the aircraft`s fate now finally known, questions remain about the circumstances surrounding the mysterious 1958 crash, which claimed the lives of eleven people, including four U.S. service members, three Taiwanese Army officers, and four Taiwanese civilian crew members. According to the Cold War Museum in Virginia, the aircraft had made routine contact after departing from the Matsu Islands and was flying at an altitude of just 1,000 feet (305 meters) to avoid the radar of Chinese aircraft while en-route to Taiwan`s capital. But about 61 nautical miles (113 kilometers) from Taipei, all contact was lost when it entered a "no radar zone" that covered a distance of 12 to 15 miles (19 to 24 kilometers). Taiwan`s defense ministry has stated on several occasions that it believed the Blue Swan had been shot down by a Chinese fighter jet, but no evidence has ever been provided to support the allegation. Others said the aircraft had been forced to land on China`s mainland, which was backed up by Chinese news reports that claimed the American service members were being held by China. Yet a third theory focused on hijacking after one report claimed a twelfth person had boarded the aircraft just before it took off from the Matsu Islands. But all theories were never supported by actual evidence, and the U.S. military said in its most recent report last month that the cause of the incident remains "undetermined." According to the Aviation Safety Network, at least 88 civilian and military aircraft worldwide have vanished without a trace since 1948. Most recently, Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 disappeared on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8 with 239 people on board, but investigators believe the aircraft continued to fly for nearly 7 more hours until it crashed in the southern Indian Ocean west of Perth.

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